

Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World

Comments by Dr. Geoff Tunnicliffe,
C.E.O./Secretary General

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When the Evangelical Alliance was established in 1846 it sought to work in four primary areas of concern:

1. Christian unity
2. Human rights, and in particular at that time the abolition of slavery
3. World evangelism
4. Religious freedom for all

Today we find ourselves with the joyous announcement of a document that fulfills all four of these concerns: Christian unity, human rights, a positive outlook of mission and evangelism, and a major step towards religious freedom - these are all part of the significance of the document *“Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct”*.

The World Evangelical Alliance, representing over 600 million Christians worldwide, is grateful that the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church have accepted us as collaborators in the process of developing the *Recommendations*.

Missionary zeal, as a sign of obedience to the gospel of Jesus, has always been a cornerstone belief for evangelicals and so it is a special privilege to have the opportunity to work with these colleagues on such a document. It is our hope that with this text we will learn together to practice our obedience better - to witness more and to be more faithful to Christ in our witnessing. Surely this brings joy to the heart of God!

The process itself has been very significant. It has brought together expert theologians and practitioners from all around the world to discuss, challenge, learn and work together in ways that we have not seen before. There has been great openness and genuine cooperation over these past five years and I want to recognize here the women and men who have worked so hard to draft, edit and revise this text with the result that we have an extraordinary piece of work before us. Without their exceptional labour and dedication to making this happen we would not be here today.

The *Recommendations*, with its three main sections: A Basis for Witness; Principles; and Recommendations, covers very succinctly the essence of Christian mission and in doing so, calls all of us back to the person and work of Christ.

We might be surprised that the document does not say “anything new” - after all, it states what many would consider to be obvious to the core of Christian mission. And yet, it has never been said before in this way! At least not so clearly and not within the context of collaboration between three Christian families of faith that jointly represent about 90% of all the Christians on the planet. This is a powerful document!

There is no genuine Christian mission without ethics, and there can be no Christian ethics without an affirmation of human dignity. The *Recommendations* cover all of these - it is a code of ethics for all Christians, especially those living and serving in contexts of religious diversity; it is an affirmation of the dignity of God’s creation; and it is a reminder to every Christian and every Christian organization that mission is at the heart of the gospel. Without mission the church is dead, but such mission must always be carried out in accordance with the demands Jesus places upon us - demands for justice, for peace, for respect, for truthfulness and for humility. Thus, following Jesus and carrying out God’s mission on earth are not in conflict with works of justice or those who struggle on behalf of human dignity, but belong together. The two go hand in hand. We witness to Christ in word and deed and both must be done according to the example set up for us by Jesus himself.

The *Recommendations* make this clear and beautifully point us to prayer as an essential part of our lives and our calling within God's mission.

The document is a major achievement for world mission and evangelism - it affirms our calling to witness as a joyous task and that through such witnessing we are made participants in the mission of God.

The document is also a major achievement for religious freedom and human rights - it calls on all Christians to reexamine their own practices in light of the life and teachings of Jesus and it shows us that part of our fidelity to the gospel entails speaking out and working for justice and freedom of all people, in every place.

It is a major achievement in our relationship with those of other religions - it recalls that our Lord is the Prince of Peace and that as his people, we are called to live in peace. Through such peace-making, we bear witness to Christ and demonstrate the respect that we should have towards all people.



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The document is a major achievement in the political arena - it shows to the governments of the world that Christians are not only able to work together, but that together we are an even stronger voice on behalf of those who suffer oppression and persecution.

It is also is a major achievement in Christian unity - it has brought together Christians from different backgrounds and traditions and with the grace of God and the help of the Holy Spirit, has enabled these people to work together on a text that will be of service to all churches and all Christians worldwide.

The leaders of the World Evangelical Alliance fully endorse this text and urge all our member alliances, international partners and churches to study, reflect and use this document within the particularities of each context.

It has been an honour and a privilege to work with our colleagues in the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches towards the production of this splendid text and we hope that this is just the beginning of many other such collaborative efforts.



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We know that our witness is made stronger and more truthful to the extent that we work together for the glory of God's reign.

This is a historic document, a historic moment and a time for Christians to awake once again to our calling to mission and unity, always bearing in mind the ways in which Jesus calls us to do so. I am thankful to all who contributed to making this happen, but our thanks go primarily to God who has made this possible, despite our failures and shortcomings.

And we pray that God may visit us all in grace and power, renewing our faith and vision, our hope and our resolve, so that we can indeed bear witness to Christ in this generation and throughout his world.